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## A SKETCH OF EASTERN DAKOTA ETHNOLOGY

By ALANSON SKINNER

THE data for the following sketch were obtained principally from Sisseton and Wahpeton informants at Sisseton, South Dakota, during the month of August, 1914, on a field expedition for the American Museum of National History. A little Isanti material was gathered the year before at Portage La Prairie, Manitoba. The works of Lowie, Wissler, Dorsey, Riggs, and Mrs. Eastman also furnished much valuable material, and the writer wishes to acknowledge the valuable assistance of Mr. Amos Oneroad, a Wahpeton, as guide, interpreter, and informant.

*Dress.*—In costume we find the Isanti and Wahpeton inclining to the Central Algonkian. Anciently the men of both groups banged their hair in front and back and dressed it in four little braids, two hanging over the forehead and two in the rear. The Wahpeton, according to some of my informants, roached the hair at one time; others denied this however. The Isanti and probably the Wahpeton used a headdress made from a woven sash twisted turbanwise about the head, or the deer's hair roach. Warriors who had entered the camp circle of the enemy and escaped alive were entitled to wear the war-bonnet.

Their shirts were of buckskin and fringeless. Their leggings were tight with large ankle flaps. There was a seam in front, down which a short fringe, half an inch long, was fastened. The tops of the leggings were large, with double strings to fasten on the belt. Only the Isanti are said to have worn beaded garters below the knee.

Moccasins were formerly of the soft-soled type, with large ankle flaps like those of the Sauk and Fox. Lately soft-soled moccasins with high extension uppers, on the Ojibwa style, seamed over the instep, are used. The women wore the two-piece Central Algonkian dress.

The Sisseton inclined more toward prairie styles. The men parted their hair in the middle and wore two braids which they wrapped with otter fur. Their shirts and leggings were furnished with exceedingly long fringe, to which scalps or twisted strips of weasel skin were added. They used buffalo robes. Their moccasins were hard soled.

*Lodges.*—While all divisions, especially the Sisseton, used the buffalo-hide tipi with a three-pole foundation, the Isanti and Wahpeton utilized the square bark house in summer and the round or hemispherical lodge in winter. These latter were sometimes heavily built and earth covered. Presumably, according to my informants, the Dakota never made benches around the inner walls of the latter. These forms are admirably illustrated by Schoolcraft. The various parts of the lodge were named and were used in a formal manner much as among the neighboring forest tribes.

*Household Utensils—Pottery.* Pottery was made of pounded clay tempered with burnt flint, pounded. The coil process being unknown, the vessel was built up by pinching from a flat bottom. It was stamped on the sides with a paddle. Ears or lugs were placed on it, and it was smeared with glue and burned by use.

*Mats* made of braided corn husks were used on the floor, and no doubt floor mats of reeds and lodge mats of bulrushes were known, though data are not now available. Corn husks were made into mats by the Delaware and Iroquois, but I do not know of their use in this manner by the Central Algonkian. A specimen was obtained by the writer for the American Museum of Natural History.

*Bowls and Spoons.*—These were of the typical Central Algonkian type. The bowls, made from knots by charring and scraping, were round or oval and of all sizes. Spoons were made of wood or buffalo horn. The wooden spoons were short handled and broad bowled, like those of the Algonkian. The bowls and spoons used in medicine feasts and dances, especially the *wakan watcipi*, had animal-head handles, and were held as sacred. Types of all these objects were collected by the writer for the American Museum of Natural History. Others are in the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.

*Flint knives*, scrapers, and arrowpoints were used, as well as similar objects of bone. A double-pitted pebble hammerstone, exactly similar to those found on ancient Indian village sites all over the east, was obtained in use, together with a rubbing and sharpening stone. Grooved mauls used as hammers, pemmican pounders, and when of large size for bone crushing, were also gathered.

*Grooved stone axes* were used, but mostly to pound wood on another stone so that it might be broken. A few flint axes were said to have served for chopping.

*Mortars and Pestles*.—Mortars were made from short sections of logs, and were of the horizontal type common to the Central Algonkian, not the vertical variety of the Southern Siouans. The pestles observed were long heavy sticks, not shaped in any way. This is a cruder style than that of the Central tribes, who made their pestles taper in the center at the grip.

*Woven Bags*.—The square woven bags of the Central Algonkian made of cedar and basswood fiber were well known. They were formerly intended for all purposes, but now are used mostly to hold medicines. Woven tobacco pouches of Menomini and Ojibwa style, square, and worn around the neck, were used.

*Stone Berry Crushers*.—Round flat pebbles were used to mash berries and cherries on a flat stone slab. The fruit was dried and mixed with pemmican.

*Parfleches*.—The Isanti utilized barrel-shaped parfleches, the Wahpeton and Sisseton preferred the flat rectangular and square box type. These were painted with angular figures. Birchbark baskets and boxes are said to have been much used formerly. The Eastern Dakota incline towards the Plains with respect to their abundant use of rawhide. The forest Indians for the most part used very little rawhide, perhaps because they could not obtain buffalo.

*Pack straps* of the Ojibwa style were usually made of moosehide, with the center piece which passes over the forehead still retaining the hair.

*Baby Boards*.—These were formerly much used and seem to be

of the same type used by both Plains Dakota and Central Algonkian, judging by old illustrations.

*Travois*.—No data on the travois were gathered.

*Canoes*.—Dug-out log canoes are still used by all three peoples—Isanti, Wahpeton, and Sisseton. The last two tribes formerly had many bark canoes.

*Weapons*.—Bows, often quite long, and arrows tipped with stone, antler, or bone, and rawhide shields were common. The warclub was either ball-headed or flat and shaped like a gun butt. Stone-headed clubs, like those of the prairie Sioux, were probably not used to any extent, unless by the Sisseton.

*Agriculture*.—Corn, beans, squashes, pumpkins, and some informants say, tobacco, were raised by the Eastern Dakota. There is some question as to the time of their introduction, however. It is possible that these Sioux obtained these things from the whites. Corn is braided and hung on horizontal bars without the lodge, to dry, or it is taken green, roasted, boiled, or cut from the cob and dried, or fried. Tipsina is dug and dried. Pumpkins and squashes were sliced and dried as among the Central Algonkian. Wild rice was formerly much used. Maple sugar was also manufactured.

*Picture Writing*.—Picture writing on flat board slabs and on birchbark, particularly in connection with hunting charms and the medicine dance, is common. The figures are the familiar semi-realistic mnemonic symbols found among the Ojibwa and Menomini and were no doubt derived from them. All the examples collected by the writer, five in number, were Wahpeton, but several more, in the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, are Sisseton.

*Tanning*.—Buffalo robes were tanned with the hair on in regular Plains style. An elkhorn or wooden-handled hoe-shaped scraper was used to remove hair from hides needed for lodge-making. Some Sisseton women marked on the scraper handles in crude etching the number of hides they had dressed, and the number of tipis they had made.

Deer hides were dressed over an inclined log and fleshed in the same manner as by the Northern and Central Algonkian. This

means nothing from a comparative standpoint, as the process was well nigh universal in North America, though not found in the Southeast in quite the same manner.

*Musical Instruments.*—The deep water drum characteristic of the medicine lodge elsewhere may have been used in the *wakan watcipi*, but ordinarily the tambourine or deeper kettle drum, with one or two heads, was most common. Ceremonial rattles were usually made of sticks strung with deer hoofs, or of deer hoofs cut in fancy shapes and strung to wear about the neck or over one shoulder in dancing. The rattles used in the medicine dance were gourds. Flageolets, often carved with loons' heads, were used for courting, and bone whistles were for war purposes and the sun dance. Metallic jinglers, probably the successors of deer hoofs, were used on clothes and bags as rattles.

*Pipes.*—Pipes made of the red catlinite were exceedingly well made and abundant, as the Eastern Dakota have controlled the catlinite quarries of Couteau des Prairies from time immemorial. Almost every conceivable type of pipe was probably made by them.

*Games.*—Among the Eastern Dakota the following games have been noted. All or nearly all are so widely found among tribes of the same and adjacent culture areas that they can scarcely be considered significant.

|                               |                                         |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Icasdohe, or bowling.         | Hoop and javelin.                       |
| Two variations of snow snake. | Shinney, played by both sexes.          |
| Bowl and dice.                | Sliding wands over instep for distance. |
| Snow arrow.                   | Tops, darts, coasting on boards.        |
| Lacrosse.                     | Kicking game, players kick each other.  |
| Cat's cradle.                 |                                         |
| Moccasin.                     |                                         |

Except bowling and coasting, I have recorded all these games from the Menomini. The Blackfoot also have the kicking game. Cup-and-ball, according to my informants, was not played by the Eastern Dakota.

*Folklore.*—The folklore of the Eastern Dakota is in the main strikingly like that of the Central Algonkian. I have observed

many parallels with that of the Menomini. However, the Dakota lack the sacred culture-hero cycle connected with the medicine dance. Many of the Dakota culture-hero stories find parallels rather among the Plains tribes and the Southern Siouans than among the forest peoples. However, a number of concepts occur which seem peculiar to the Dakota of both forest and prairie divisions, and are not found elsewhere. In particular may be mentioned the Double Women (*Wi<sup>n</sup>ya<sup>n</sup> nupapi*), visions of whom force youths to become berdaches, and the Tree-Dweller, a stump-inhabiting dwarf. The Eastern Dakota, so far as my relatively meager information goes, have no beliefs concerning a mythical dwarf race, flying skeletons, night-wandering ogres, nor mysterious bundle-carrying goblins like the Algonkian to the east and north.

*Burial Customs.*—Perhaps all the Eastern Dakota at one time practised tree or scaffold burial. The Sisseton certainly did and older literature seems to point out that this was sometimes done by the Isanti and Wahpeton. For a long time all have buried in the ground, and I believe it was always customary for part of the Isanti and Wahpeton to do this. Graves were made with little houses above them in the Central Algonkian style. Little information was gathered on funeral and mourning customs, but all were of the Central Algonkian type. The death bundle, containing a lock of the deceased person's hair, and supposed to harbor one of his spirits, was kept, as is universal among the Central Algonkian. Like the Cree and Menomini the Dakota believed each person had two spirits (some say four), one of which, the soul, went to the other world. The soul was supposed to travel to the hereafter in much the same way as the Central Algonkian relate, the trip requiring four days' time, and ending with the crossing of a river, but the incidents of the journey are different and less elaborate. The souls were not supposed to have to cross a bridge.

*Mourning Customs.*—A lock of hair of the deceased is taken and kept in a bundle which is placed in the rear of the lodge in the sacred place. After a time a feast is given, and a person of the same age and sex of the departed takes the clothes making up the bundle and eats the food. The lock of hair is then buried and the spirit remaining in the hair is thought to leave.

Among the Menomini this custom is also in vogue, and the practices of these Algonkian people throw light on the meaning of the Dakota ceremony, now forgotten. The guest of the same age and sex is supposed to represent the deceased and be animated by his soul released from the hereafter by the keeper of the land of departed spirits for the occasion. After the ceremony, the impersonator of the dead is faced to the west and the soul of the deceased is dismissed to return. The Menomini ceremony is connected with the Medicine lodge.

A distinctly characteristic feature among the Eastern Dakota was the custom of having the society of the deceased, kit-fox, no-flight, or whatever it may be, mourn for him. The Dakota widows mourned four years, and dressed in wretched rags, etc., precisely like the Central tribes. Unlike the Cree, Ojibwa, and Menomini, the Dakota did not carry the body of the deceased out through the back of the lodge.

*Naming Customs.*—Ordinal names were used, and also personal individual titles. In the scalp dance a man might throw away his name and take that of a dead warrior relative, giving presents to the poor at the same time.

Children were named by their grandparents for some deed done in war, or after a famous ancestor. Guests were invited to a feast, after which the old person named the child, and a crier was sent out to announce it. Gifts were then made. The Bungi branch of the Plains-Ojibwa had this latter custom, but the Central Algonkian differed from it so far as my information goes.

*Children's Training and Puberty Fasting.*—Young male children were constantly instructed with regard to their future puberty fasts. Later, when the period arrived the boys would retire to the top of a hill and wail all night. Their faces were not blackened as among the Central Algonkian, where, by the way, both sexes fasted. Some youths had their hands tied behind their backs to keep them from running away. Others were bound to four stakes. These customs do not apply to the Central Algonkian.

Among the Central tribes dreams were generally of some of the great fundamental mythic powers of the universe, the sun, morning-

star, thunder, moon, horned snake, or underneath bear or panther. The Dakota dreamed of the ordinary bear, buffalo, elk, *unktehi* (underneath snake or panther), and Tree Dweller. Those who dreamed of the Double Women usually became berdaches.

The Central Algonkian could reject a dream three times, the Dakota must take what came to him at first. Generally, the "spirit" appeared to him as a man and went away in its true animal shape, although sometimes it never assumed an anthropomorphic form. Among the Central Algonkian the great cosmic powers generally appeared as idealized men, but when animals came, as they did, rarely, they always came in their own shapes.

It is believed some Dakota had a prenatal existence on earth and knew their guardians before they were born, having met them when wandering over the world as disembodied spirits. This is not a Central Algonkian idea, though the Menomini believe some children are incarnated strong powers and under their protection from birth, especially in the case of those descended from the thunderbirds.

*Marriage.*—This was arranged for the young people after they had met secretly. The groom's father or an old man hired by him acted as go-between; and the girl was ceremonially taken to the groom's lodge riding upon a fine horse. On the way the youth's brothers met her, assisted her to dismount, and carried her back in a blanket. Reciprocal gifts and feasting followed. Marriage by simple elopement also occurred.

*Dances and Societies.*—The Eastern Dakota had a number of military societies of the Plains type. Each of these was characterized by its own peculiar costume and rites, generally including the no-flight vow for the officers. The officers usually carried lances either straight or crooked, and other regalia. Through the writings of Wissler and Lowie these societies are well known and the reader is referred to the Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, volume XI, for descriptions of them. For the purposes of this paper the writer will merely enumerate these and other societies and roughly point out their affiliations.

Military Societies of the Plains type: Tokana, No-Flight, Mawatani, Raven Owners, Badgers, Owl Feather Wearers.

Social Societies of the Plains type: Omaha.

Societies and Dances found among the Central Algonkian: Buffalo Dance, Medicine Dance.

The latter dance deserves more than mere passing mention. While externally it resembles the Ojibwa and Central Algonkian Midewiwin, its organization and ritual are of a very different order, placing it with the Iowa, Oto, and Winnebago. It is perhaps intermediate between the Omaha and Ponca and Central Algonkian types. The coyote dance resembles the Winnebago woman's dance. The heyoka clowns are found among many Plains tribes.

A certain number of peculiar cults and dances seem to be decidedly original with the Eastern Dakota, a few are found among both Eastern and Western divisions but among no other peoples. These organizations and dances are: Elk Ear, Thunder, Elk, Double Women, Bear, Raw Fish Eaters, Dog Liver Eaters, Yumini Watcipi, Mocking Dance. The Eastern Dakota bear dance resembles the Central Algonkian ceremony of that name only in its title.

#### SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

According to the latest information, gathered by the writer in South Dakota all three major bands of the Eastern Dakota were subdivided into exogamous patrilineal gentes, each of which had its place in the tribal camp circle and each of which had its own civil officers. Marriage within the gens was tolerated after a special ceremony, but this was rare indeed. The Sisseton were divided into nine groups nicknamed for traditional peculiarities; the Wahpeton into six, mostly named from the localities where they lived; and the Isanti into six groups named for their chiefs. None of these bands were given animal names like the gentes of other tribes, instead their titles were more like the band names of the Plains peoples. Much confusion has been made by the varying fortunes of some of the gentes, especially among the Isanti, where first one gens then another has been most popular and important, and the name of the division changed accordingly, the band being called for each gens which became predominant. Finally, the Isanti band prevailed and gave its name to the group.

*Government.*—Each gens had its own group of twenty *wakicun* or councilors who had a tent of their own. In the tribal camp circle each councilor's tent was pitched in front of the place occupied by his gens. For matters of tribal importance the councilors of all gentes got together. All the councilors had equal authority and each gens voted as a unit. They had a herald who announced their decisions. The chief's office was hereditary in later years, but formerly men achieved the honor through wisdom and prowess. Perhaps there were no chiefs before white advent. On all occasions except when in tribal council the chief had no authority over the councilors; in the tribal council he was supreme. Each chief had his own "head soldier" or *akitcita* (Lowie's data make it four instead of one) who was his agent in all affairs, and who held office for life. Some at least of the older Dakota believe that much of their political organization was due to French suggestion, at least so far as the coalition of the different tribes was concerned.

The *akitcita*, known as "soldiers," or "police," were individuals selected for their bravery and not entire military societies chosen for the purpose at different times as among the Teton Dakota. Occasionally, this may have been done among the Sisseton, and according to Lowie, among the Wahpeton, but the society, generally the kit-foxes (Tokala), seems never to have had full rights. In other words, the Eastern Dakota more nearly resembled the Algonkian and Southern Siouan than the Teton in this respect. The *akitcita* performed the typical acts of soldier killing, had their separate tipi, and their challenging contests, etc., in regular Plains style.

A man became *akitcita* or eligible for service after having performed any one of a certain number of specified deeds of valor, such as counting coup, killing or scalping a foe or rescuing a friend. The greatest deed of all was to perform one of the series before having spoken to any young woman save his sister. All these deeds entitled the performer to some special insignia. The war-bonnet was given a man who succeeded in penetrating the enemy's camp circle.

## CONCLUSION

An analysis of the culture of the Eastern Dakota shows that the Isanti and Wahpeton divisions seem intermediate between the Forest and Plains peoples. In material culture they are almost wholly of the Woodland type, especially do they resemble the Central Algonkian. On the other hand, other aspects of their culture represent a mixture. In social and political organization they incline toward the prairie tribes, or at most toward the Southern Siouans, ceremonially they are either original or like the prairie people, with a smattering of Algonkian influence, especially as regards hunting customs connected with medicine and charms, and bark and board pictographs. While possessing a form of the medicine dance it seems, so far as our present knowledge goes, to resemble more closely the phase found among the Southern Siouan than the typical Central Algonkian.

The Sisseton show a stronger relationship with the Plains. This perhaps is due to their geographical position, for they were farther from the forest and its influences than were either Wahpeton and Isanti, and less in contact with the Central Algonkian. In costume, lodges, subordination of agriculture (although even the Yankton raised some corn), in fact respecting all points of material culture, forest influences were weaker, and socially, politically, and ceremonially they were more strongly inclined to the Plains.

The Isanti and Wahpeton may perhaps be considered typical intermediate tribes, whereas the Sisseton, like the Ponca and Omaha, and the Plains-Cree, have crossed the transition line and are just on the border of true Plains culture.

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